

# Bringing in the Big Guns

Story and Photos



The movement to Kosovo was the first real-world deployment of the the Paladins of the Schweinfurt, Germany-based 1st Battalion, 7th Field Artillery.



A Paladin rumbles down a country road toward a training area near the Serb village of Ranilug.

**A** PLATOON of M109A6 Paladin self-propelled howitzers from Battery A, 1st Battalion, 7th Field Artillery, a 1st Infantry Division unit based in Schweinfurt, Germany, occupied a hilltop north of the Serb village of Ranilug, Kosovo, during a recent exercise.

The howitzers, fast field artillery ammunition carriers and fire-control center vehicles are based at Camp Monteith in Gnjilane.

"We perform a variety of missions, including peacekeeping and force protection," said battalion executive officer MAJ John Sims. In Kosovo, the

by Heike Hasenauer



Paladins protect a Serbian Orthodox monastery in the mountains. “But this training gives us a chance to hone high-intensity operation skills. ‘Shoot, move and communicate’ is our motto,” Sims said.

During the exercise some battery members played the roles of casualties, and other battery assets, among them battalion medical officer 1LT Sheldon Watson, provided support.

“The exercise gives the platoon a chance to hone its skills and allows the commander to test actions he would take with fewer soldiers,” Watson said.

“We were the first battalion in

Europe to get the upgraded M109A6 Paladins,” Sims said. When the Paladins deployed to Kosovo, it was the weapon’s first real-world deployment from U.S. Army, Europe.

The 1st Bn., 7th FA, deployed to Bosnia, but without the Paladins, Sims said. “And we were scheduled to take the Paladins to Kuwait for exercise Intrinsic Action, but that was cancelled before Kosovo.

“Soon after arriving here, battery soldiers fired 10 illumination rounds in support of 1st Bn., 26th Inf., snipers who came under fire while assisting Russian soldiers,” he said.

During the exercise, each four-man crew was required to determine correct azimuths for firing into Serbia, establish voice and digital communications with the platoon operations center 10 kilometers away, and establish firing capability within two minutes of the order to fire, Sims said. □

*The 1st Bn., 7th FA, was the first battalion in Europe to get the upgraded M109A6 Paladins.*